Secret Israel Military Base Discovered by Iraqi Shepherd: How It Alters Iran War

By g.calder | May. 12th, 2026

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A new report by the Wall Street Journal has exposed Israel's covert military outpost hidden in Iraq's western desert, built *before* the war with Iran. According to the Journal, special forces and rescue teams staffed the base, and it was used to support air operations against Iranian targets. Apparently, the base was only uncovered after a local shepherd noticed unusual military activity and notified Iraqi troops who were sent to investigate. One of the soldiers was killed by the resulting Israeli strike and two others were wounded, in order to protect the base's secrecy.

The significance of this report goes beyond one undercover installation – it would mean the war against Iran was fought not just through long-range sorties and public threats, but using concealed infrastructure on foreign soil that dragged Iraq, unknowingly, into the conflict too.

Vast Najaf Desert in Iraq Allegedly Used by Israel and US to Fight Iran War

According to reports, the outpost was built in February near the Saudi border and served as a logistics hub for the Israeli Air Force during the Iran campaign. It was also home to special forces and search-and-rescue teams positioned to recover Israeli pilots if aircraft were downed over Iran (although none are reported to have needed rescuing), and meant attacks could secretly be launched on Iran from much closer range.

Crucially, it's also claimed that Israel built the hidden base with US knowledge just before the war began. However, US officials maintain they were not involved in the March attack on Iraqi troops that nearly discovered the base following notification by the local shepherd.

Western Iraq's vast and sparsely populated desert makes it especially suitable for temporary bases of this kind. American special forces also used the same region during operations against Saddam Hussein in 1991 and 2003, demonstrating its strategic value for covert military operations.

Coverage by Arab publication Asharq Al-Awsat says the revelation has "caused uproar in Iraq" and noted that the country's top officials are yet to comment. Early in the war, which was ignited by US-Israeli attacks on Iran on 28 February, troops were detected operating in the Najaf desert. According to security officials, Israeli forces established a base in an abandoned airstrip. One confirmed, "there are no longer forces there, but they have have left equipment," adding that the Israeli operation "was in coordination with the US".

Iraq was drawn into the ongoing Iran war at the beginning, with strikes targeting Iran-backed armed groups, which in turn launched hundreds of attacks on US interests in Iraq and across the Gulf region. Original reports of foreign troops operating in the Najaf desert emerged early in the war when a shepherd reported unusual activity in the area. However, nothing was successfully revealed at the time because of the resulting strike.

Looking back on it, it may have inadvertently been addressed at the time. On 5 March, right after the first reported sightings, a statement was made by Qais al-Mohamadawi, Iraq's deputy commander of joint operations. He had said that there were reports of "individuals or movement in the Najaf desert" and members of the military were sent to investigate. The troops came under heavy aerial fire, leaving one soldier dead and two others wounded, and the area was later searched although nothing was found. Mohamadawi confirmed no foreign troops were authorised to be in that location.

Another security official said on Sunday that there were "indications that the operation involved an Israeli technical team under American military protection".

Defenders of regional sovereignty argue that Israel building and operating a military base without Baghdad's knowledge or permission constitutes an illegal foreign military presence. Qais al-Mohamadawi said, following the revelation, that "it appears there was a certain force on the ground before the strike, supported from the air, operating beyond the capabilities of our units".

There's also a demand for accountability for the Iraqi casualties, with Israeli forces alleged to have unlawfully killed one solider conducting legitimate security operations on Iraqi territory, warranting international condemnation and accountability. The role and responsibility of the US has been brought into question too, with claims that Washington enabled Israeli violations of Iraqi sovereignty by providing advance knowledge and tacit approval, making them complicit in the unauthorised operation and resulting casualties.

However, supporters are calling the covert outpost a legitimate wartime necessity that provided critical logistical support for operations against Iran while minimising regional escalation. The airstrikes are deemed necessary defensive measures by some, saying that protecting operational security and preventing the exposure of critical military assets during active combat operations was justified.

The advocates for strategic security also argue that the US awareness of allied operations is a standard intelligence coordination between partners, and Washington is not automatically responsible for the March strikes on Iraqi forces.

The base being exposed changes the overall complexion because it puts Iraqi territory inside the operational chain, rather than just on the fringes. This isn't a case of missiles passing overhead, or regional fallout spilling across a border: the allegation is that Israeli forces established a concealed wartime hub on Iraqi soil, with US permission, and not only used it to support attacks on neighbouring Iran, but even sacrificed Iraqi troops to maintain cover. In short, Iraq's own land was being secretly used to advance a war it was not aware it was actively participating in.

It also sharpens the political relationship and how Iraq fits between Washington and Tehran. The Financial Times reported Baghdad condemning a separate US strike as a "heinous crime" and summoned the US envoy in protest, before later blaming Israel instead. It means that while the Iraqi government was trying to respond to lethal attacks on its own forces, it lacked a clear picture of who was really operating on its territory and with whose knowledge.

If Washington really knew about the secret base apparently set up by Israel, then Iraq must confront the possibility that its chief security partner knew Iraqi soil was being used for the Iran campaign, while its own government did not. As a country already pulled between US power, Iranian influence, militia pressure and chronic instability, this kind of revelation doesn't just embarrass a government; it exposes how little control they really have over their own land.

Asharq Al-Awsat quoted a source close to the government saying the revelations about the Israeli base underscore the "grave flaws in the Iraqi security forces' ability in protecting the country and securing its borders", continuing that "Iraq

boasts over 1.5 million security forces and over 6 billion dollars a year are spent on them, and yet, they failed in protecting the country."

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